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## ON THE GIFT OF HUMOUR.

HUMOUR—a keen sense of the ridiculous—has been called, what it undeniably is, a dangerous gift. Charming as cheerfulness is universally allowed to be, and greatly as cheerfulness is aided by a happy sense of humour, this gift may, if indulged beyond the limits of 'becoming mirth,' be destructive of that state of mind the most healthful for young or old—namely, a reverence for something nobler, greater, better than ourselves. Ridicule, so useful a weapon when employed to fight folly, presumption, or hypocrisy, needs careful handling, and in the implied superiority of the person wielding it lies the danger. Not always is mockery justified of her children. The jibes which patient merit of the would-be witty takes are more injurious to the mocker than the mocked. A youth of little reverence is apt to curdle into an old age of contempt—despising and despised. And here lies the danger to the mimic; urged on by the laughter so easily created, he too often outsteps the modesty of nature, and sacrifices his own self-respect for effect; thus, while all laugh, few love, and still fewer respect him. If a humorous man does not love generosity, kindness, morality, and religion more than humour, he is in 'a parlous state.'

But while granting freely the danger of the gift of humour, it must be allowed that there are times and seasons when it is dangerous to be without it. In the hands of a non-humorous man, not only does pathos degenerate into bathos, but things that should be sacred suffer almost as much, if not more than they can do in those of his opposite. Thus teachers, lecturers, orators, and even some preachers, for want of this dangerous gift, occasionally do and say things perilously likely to awaken it in others. Unconscious that they are not carrying their hearers with them, unaware of some mannerism, some tincture of oddity, they not only miss their aim, but possibly hit a mark they never intended. To such, the gift of humour, rather than a snare, would be an invaluable safeguard. For instance, we all re-

member the laughter which greeted the late Earl of Beaconsfield's ironical self-congratulations on the 'solid piece of furniture' betwixt himself and his right honourable and impassioned opponent, who, borne away on the tide of his own enthusiastic eloquence, had made use of gestures which were not without their ludicrous side.

Again, most people can recall occasions when, in listening to a sermon, some trifling impediment has interfered with their due appreciation of the same. We recollect one such. The preacher, an extempore one, had placed in his Bible certain 'markers' in the shape of long slips of paper at certain texts to be quoted in his discourse. As these slips were discarded, they were allowed to float away whither they listed, and their general list was to whirl round in spirals for some seconds before settling. Sometimes two would be in motion at once, and it was quite impossible for us to prevent ourselves speculating on their destination. One, we well remember, twirled into the glass of water placed for the preacher's refreshment. It was a perilous moment for the gravity of more than one of his younger hearers when he came to drink.

A lecturer to whom we once listened, who read every word of his lecture, had sewn the leaves together with such injudicious firmness that the last word of each line was all but indecipherable—a pain to himself and an exasperation to his audience. This gentleman was so little aware of the want of touch between himself and his hearers, that the ironical plaudits which gradually began to salute his success in getting at a more difficult word than usual, only evoked an assurance that though the applause was extremely gratifying to him, he rather feared it took up time! The cheers this provoked took up so much time that when they were over, a good part of his hearers also were gone.

We take it that in both these instances a keener perception of the ludicrous—or, as some have asserted, the incongruous, reckoning the latter as an integral part of the former—would have been serviceable.

Nothing that we know of brings people more together, makes them feel so profoundly 'the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin,' as a good honest hearty side-shaking laugh, not even excepting an earthquake. If terror and pity purge the soul of pride and self-love, so does laughter clear away the fog of supercilious self-importance. An apt word, it may be an unconscious pun, will often serve the purpose of a soft answer to turn away wrath. We remember once, when an irascible whist-player was urging and goading his unfortunate partner to greater speed in playing, that the mild reproof which restored harmony by evoking laughter was given in this unconscious pun: 'Come, come, you take an hour yourself, and give me no quarter.' On another occasion, a young subaltern, smarting under the rather emphatically expressed displeasure of his colonel for some slight breach of etiquette, ended his indignant description of the scene to his mess-mates by perpetrating a ludicrous but unconscious pun. The laughter which this produced extinguished the young officer's anger.

But laughter to be wholesome must not only be seasonable, but seasoned to the understanding; for as a knavish speech sleeps in a dull ear, so will a joke hang fire wofully sometimes in a rusty receptacle. Perhaps not a boy in the school perceived that the dunce who called the patriarchs 'partridges' was probably attempting a jest. Among all the definitions of man, such as an animal with pockets—by the way, the Marsupials must be allowed to run him close in this particular—as a laughing animal and so on, we think this last—taking laughing as indicative of a sense of humour—to be among the least justified by facts. Many animals, not human, are endowed with a most delightful sense of fun, which they express in antics the most gay and frolicsome. Setting aside the race of monkeys, whose fun is perhaps too nearly allied to mischief to be pure, and whose countenances of utter woe seem always to give the lie to the mirth their actions seem to display—setting aside, then, our distant cousins, who can deny the gift of humour, not merely to kittens, whose playfulness might be supposed to be due in some measure to their youth—but, say, to an old pony 'playing' his would-be captor? Look at the indescribable air of drollery in his pricked ears, half-closed eyes, and dilated nostrils sniffing at the sieve of oats for which he has no longing, but which he will pretend to desire for the pure fun of the hour's dance he is going to lead his groom. Again, if you should happen ever to have watched two half-grown cats at their play, is not the sudden raising of the shoulders of the one who comes unexpectedly on its play-fellow unmistakably and consciously humorous? Of late it has been the fashion, since Rivière painted them, to glorify pigs as the most humorous of beasts, and a drove of piglings, with tails, ears, and eyelids twinkling, as they emerge from cover for a gallop, or return to shelter in a stampede of pretended terror because a piece of thistle-down has crossed their flight, looks certainly an embodiment of sheer unalloyed and grotesque humour. But such instances might be multiplied almost

endlessly. Women, as being gifted with smaller brains than men, have often been credited with a less keen sense of the ridiculous; and Queen Elizabeth's masculine appreciation of the character of Falstaff has been praised lately at the expense of the want of humour in the rest of her sex. It must be granted, we fear, that the fat knight is no favourite with women; but we would suggest, in all humility, that if so, it is because women love not fun the less, but decency more. We cannot but think that such a charge might be more easily maintained by reference to the manuals of fashion. Looking back for years, nay, centuries, on the vagaries into which fashion has led its male and female votaries, we must concede that upon the whole men cut a less ridiculous figure than their sisters. That 'deformed thief, fashion,' but too often proves himself what he is, by stealing from women their perception of beauty as well as the wit which their attire should exhibit.

We have endeavoured to show that humour, under certain restrictions, may be a valuable gift, enabling a man to avoid some of the snares and pitfalls of life. That we might, as human beings, have lived our lives by the light of pure reason alone, cannot be denied, just as tasteless food might have nourished our bodies; but life is not colourless and tasteless; we have bright colours to delight our eyes, sweet scents and sounds to charm pain and age—the morning's 'smile,' 'the valleys stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing'—he who will may see and acknowledge that all this light and brightness makes life all the better worth living. It rests a good deal with himself whether he shall be cheered with innocent laughter, kindly humour, genuine mirth, or whether he shall kill joy by that suicide of a smile—a sneer, and despising the banquet that has been so graciously prepared for him, choose rather to walk heavily and morosely all the days of his pilgrimage.

## MY SHIPMATE LOUISE.

THE ROMANCE OF A WRECK.

### CHAPTER XV.—A SINGULAR PLOT.

It speedily ran amongst us of the cuddy that the dead sailor who had been so very impressively interred by old Keeling had returned to the ship, and was alive in some part of her, secure in handcuffs or in leg-irons; but so much was made of the fire which had broken out that Crabb's reappearance lost as a miracle half the weight it would have carried had it happened alone. Besides, the sense of the people soon gathered that the business was a plot which had been managed with astonishing cleverness, and it all seemed plain as mud in a wine-glass when the whisper went round that Hemmeridge was under arrest as an arch-conspirator in the matter. And certainly it made one feel far from comfortable even to think that for the past weeks a ruffian of a true piratical complexion had been secreted in the ship's hold, where his confederates would keep him supplied with tobacco and the means of lighting it, and where, in his

borings and prying, he was tolerably certain to have stumbled upon something inflammatory in the shape of spirits. Indeed, it made me draw my breath short when my mind went to the rum puncheons and the powder-magazine below, and to the vision of Crabb, drunk, stupidly groping with a naked light in his hand, during some midnight hour, maybe, when we were all in bed.

However, the imagination of the passengers would hardly go to these lengths. Their thoughts held to the fire, and their talk chiefly concerned it. When the skipper came below for a glass of grog that night, the ladies so baited him with questions that one pitied him almost for not being able to enjoy the privilege of venting his heated soul in a few strong words.

'I cannot satisfy myself, Captain Keeling, that the fire is utterly extinguished,' said Mrs Bannister.

'Might it not burst out again, capt'g?' cried Mrs Hudson. 'There should be plenty of pails kept filled with water ready to empty if smoke is smelt.'

'Perhaps something may be on fire even now!' exclaimed Mrs Jolliffe, 'something that doesn't make a smoke; and how then are the sailors to tell if all is right in the bottom of the ship?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried Mrs Trevor, 'is it quite safe to go to bed, do you think?'

'If a fire should break out,' said Miss Hudson in a trembling voice, as though shudder after shudder were chasing through her, 'how can we depend upon being called? It is impossible to hear down-stairs what is going on on deck.'

Poor old Marline-spike made a bolt of it at last, fairly turning tail and rushing up the companion steps when it came to the Colonel striking in and topping off the female broadsides by inquiries of a like nature delivered at the very height of his pipes.

However, the night passed quietly; and when next morning came and the people assembled at breakfast all fear of fire was seemingly gone, and little more was talked about than Crabb and what his designs had been, the topic gathering no mean accentuation from the doctor's vacant place. Somewhere about ten o'clock I was standing at the taffrail watching the ship's wake, that was languidly streaming off in a short oily surface, and wondering whether, if we were to fall in with nothing brisker than these faint airs and draughts of wind, all hands would not have grown white-haired and decrepit by the time we were up with the Cape, leaving the Indian Ocean and Bombay out of consideration, when the head-steward came up to me.

'Captain Keeling's compliments, sir, and he'll feel greatly obliged, providing you're not hotherwise occupied, by your stepping to his cabin, sir.'

'Oh yes, with pleasure,' said I. 'Is he alone?'

'He is not, sir.'

I went down the companion steps, knocked at the captain's door, and entered. It was a roomy interior, a very noble ship's berth, occupying hard

upon the width of the deck right aft, saving, as I have before described, a sort of small chart-room alongside, bulkheaded off. There was a large stern window, after the olden fashion, with the blue line of the horizon gently sliding up and down it, and a shivering light lifting off the sea to the glass, sharp and of a sort of azure brilliancy, as though from diamonds set a-trembling. Keeling, in full fig, his face showing of a dark red against some maple-coloured ground of bulkhead or ship's side, was seated at a table. He instantly rose on my entering, gave me one of his wire-drawn bows, and motioned me to a seat, thanking me in a few words for coming. On the starboard hand stood Crabb and the sailmaker, handcuffed, and on either side of them was a seaman with a cutlass dangling at his hip. On the port hand sat Dr Hemmeridge, his legs crossed, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his head drooped. He was deadly pale, and looked horribly ill and worried. Near him was one of the sailors, a young fellow of some seven or eight and twenty, with a quantity of hair falling over his brow, a straggling beard, and small black eyes, which roamed swiftly in glances charged methought with the spirit of mutiny and menace and defiance. Mr France was at the captain's elbow; and the third mate was seated at an end of the table with a pen in his hand and some paper in front of him.

I bowed to Hemmeridge, but he took no notice. Until the captain addressed me, I stared hard at Crabb; for even now, with the ugly ruffian standing before me, my mind found it difficult to realise that he was alive; that the creature I gazed at was the man whom all hands of us, with an exception or two, supposed overboard a thousand fathoms deep. There was besides the fascination of his ugliness. The hunch-like curve of his back, his little blood-stained eyes looking away from his nose, as though they sought to peer at something at the back of his head, the greasy trail of caroty hair upon his back, the fragment of nose over his hare-lip, these and the rest of him combined into the representation of the most extravagantly grotesque ill-favoured figure ever witnessed outside the bars of a menagerie. The sailmaker's face was as white as one of his bolts of canvas, but it wore a determined look, though I noticed a quivering in the nostrils of his high-perched nose, and a constant uneasy movement of the fingers, as of dying hands plucking at bedclothes.

'Mr Dugdale,' exclaimed old Keeling with the dignity and gravity of a judge, 'I've taken the liberty to send for you, as I am informed by Mr France that when that man there'—inclining his head towards Crabb without looking at him—'was lying, as it was supposed, dead in his bunk, you accompanied Mr Hemmeridge the ship's surgeon'—here he indicated the doctor with a motion of his head but without looking at him either—'into the fore-castle, and stood for some considerable time surveying the so-called corpse.'

'That is quite true,' said I.

'Did Mr Hemmeridge expose the man's face to you?'

'He did.'

'What impression was produced upon your mind by the sight of the—of the—body?'

Crabb gave a horrible grin.

'That he was stone-dead, Captain Keeling; so stone-dead, sir, that I can scarcely credit the man himself is now before me.'

Hemmeridge looked up and fixed his eyes upon me.

'It is but reasonable I should inform you, Mr Dugdale,' continued old Marline-spike, 'that Mr Hemmeridge is under arrest on suspicion of conspiring with Crabb, with Willett, and with Thomas Bobbins'—he glanced at the man who stood next to the doctor—to plunder the ship. Bobbins has given evidence that leaves me in no doubt as to the guilt of Crabb and Willett.'

Crabb uttered a curse through his teeth, accompanied with a look at the young seaman, in the one-eyed gleam of which murder methought was writ too large to be mistaken for any other intention. Old Keeling did not heed him.

'Bobbins' story,' he continued, 'is to this effect: that Crabb was to swallow a potion which would produce the appearance of death; that the sailmaker was to have a hammock weighted, shaped, and in all respects equipped to resemble the one in which Crabb would be stitched up: that in the dead of night, when the ship was silent, and the deck forward vacant, the sham hammock was to be placed upon the fore-hatch by the sailmaker and Bobbins, and the cover containing that man—inclining his head at Crabb—conveyed into the sailmaker's cabin, where it was to be cut open, the man freed, and secreted in the berth till consciousness had returned, and he was in a fit state to seize the first opportunity of sneaking into the hold.—All this was done,' old Keeling went on, 'Mr Prance meanwhile looking as grave as an owl over the skipper's shoulder, whilst every now and again a hideous grin would distort Crabb's frightful mouth, though the sailmaker continued to stare at the captain with a white and determined countenance, and Hemmeridge to listen with a frowning worried look, his leg that crossed the other swinging like a pendulum. 'The man Crabb got into the hold, was supplied with food and drink by Willett and Bobbins, and with tools to enable him to break into the mail-room'—

'And I'd ha' done it too,' here interrupted Crabb in a voice like a saw going through a balk of timber, 'if it hadn't been for the stinking smoke of them blasted blankets.'

'This inquiry,' continued Keeling, 'now entirely concerns Mr Hemmeridge. You tell me, Mr Dugdale, that Crabb seemed to you as a stone-dead man.'

'The devil himself couldn't ha' told the difference,' bawled Crabb. 'He's not in it,' insolently motioning with his elbow towards the doctor. 'Wouldn't that blooming Bobbins ha' said so?' and he darted another murderous glance at the hairy young sailor.

'I can assure you, Captain Keeling,' said I, 'that the man was perfectly dead. There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that Mr Hemmeridge was fully convinced the body was a corpse. Convinced, captain, but dissatisfied too; and perhaps,' said I, with a glance at Crabb, 'it is a pity for more sakes than one that he did not carry out his idea of a post-mortem examination.'

'Mr Dugdale,' exclaimed Hemmeridge in a low, deep, trembling voice, 'before God and man, I am innocent; and I hope to live to call Captain Keeling to account for this monstrous slander, this enormous suspicion, this dishonourable and detestable accusation.'

'I've never heered,' said the man named Bobbins, in a long-drawn whining voice, 'that this gent was consarned. I remember Crabb asking what was to be done if so be the surgeon should cut him up to see what he died of, and Mr Willett kissed the Bible afore Crabb and me to this: that if the surgeon made up his mind to open Crabb, Willett was to show him the bottle of physic, and to tell him that Crabb had took it for some bad complaint, and that, though he might look dead, he worn't so.'

Crabb hove a fearful curse at the man. The bushy-whiskered sailor who guarded him on the right significantly put his hand upon the hilt of his cutlass whilst he said something to him under his breath.

'This is new to me,' exclaimed Keeling, screwing his eye gimblet-fashion into the face of Bobbins, and then letting it drop, as if satisfied. —'Mr Hemmeridge, I have suspected you, sir; but it's a little soon for you to talk of my having accused you. You are a medical man. If anybody knows death by looking upon it you should. Yet, though this man Crabb is merely counterfeiting death, you come aft to me and report him dead! What am I to infer? Your ignorance or your guilt, sir?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried I, 'believe me when I promise you the man was not counterfeiting death. He was to all intents and purposes a corpse. How was this brought about? Surely by no exercise of his own art. The look of the eye—the droop of the jaw—the hue of the skin—Captain Keeling, it was death to the sight: no counterfeit—an effect produced by something much more powerful than the effort of such a will as that man has;' and I pointed with my thumb at Crabb, who told me with a curse to mind my own business.

'Mr Dugdale, I thank you,' said Hemmeridge, bowing to me.

Captain Keeling held up a long thin phial about three-quarters full of a dark liquor. I had not before noticed it.

'This has been produced,' said he, 'by the man Bobbins, who states that it is the stuff which Crabb swallowed, and which produced the death-like aspect you saw in him.' He put the bottle down; then clenching his fist, smote the table violently. 'I cannot credit it!' he cried. 'I cannot be imposed on. Am I to believe that there is any drug in existence which will produce in a living being the exact semblance of death?'

'Oh, I think so, sir,' said Prance, speaking mildly.

Hemmeridge sneered.

'A semblance of death,' roared old Keeling, twisting round upon his chief-mate, 'capable of deceiving the eye—the practised eye of a medical man? You may give me a dose of laudanum, and I may look dead to you, sir, but not to Mr Hemmeridge yonder.—No, sir; I am not to be persuaded,' and here he brought his fist down upon the table again. 'It is either gross ignor-



ance or direct connivance, and I mean to be satisfied—I mean to sift it to the bottom—I mean to get at the truth!’

His face was full of blood, and he puffed and blew like a swimmer struggling for his life.

‘You’ve got the truth,’ broke in Crabb, with an oath.

The armed sailor ground his elbow into the fellow’s ribs.

‘I am merely here to answer your questions, Captain Keeling,’ said I; ‘and must apologise for taking a single step beyond the object you had in calling me to you; but at least permit me to ask, cannot Mr Hemmeridge explain the nature of the drug contained in that bottle?’

‘I do not know what it is,’ exclaimed Hemmeridge.

‘Suppose, sir,’ said Mr Prance, ‘we give Crabb another dose; then you’ll be able to judge for yourself.’

‘You don’t give me no more doses!’ said Crabb. ‘Try it on yourselves.’

The captain sat a little, looking at me vacantly, lost in thought. He suddenly turned to Hemmeridge.

‘You are at liberty, sir; I remove the arrest.’

‘And is that all?’ exclaimed the other, after a brief pause, viewing him steadily. ‘I must have an apology, sir; an apology ample, abundant, satisfying.’

Old Keeling looked as if about to say something strong, then checked himself. ‘You can leave this cabin, sir.’

Hemmeridge rose from his chair. ‘I leave this cabin, sir,’ said he, ‘and I also leave my duties. Professionally, I do no more in this ship, sir. You have disgraced, you have dishonoured me. But,’ said he, shaking his finger at him, ‘you shall make me amends at Bombay, sir—you shall make me amends at Bombay!’

He stalked from the cabin, old Keeling watching him with a frown, but in silence.

‘Captain,’ I exclaimed, rising as the door closed behind the doctor, ‘I am persuaded that Mr Hemmeridge is innocent of all participation in this bad business. You have on board a gentleman who, I believe, has a very extensive knowledge of drugs and herbs and the like—I mean Mr Saunders. It is just possible he might know the nature of the contents of that bottle.’

Keeling reflected a minute, and then said: ‘Mr Prance, send my compliments to Mr Saunders, and ask him to my cabin.’

The mate went out; I was following him.

‘Pray, stay a little, Mr Dugdale,’ said the skipper. ‘Men, take those fellows forward.—Remain where you are,’ he added, turning to Bobbins.

A seaman flung open the door, and Crabb and the sailmaker passed out, followed by the second armed sailor, who silenced some blasphemous abuse that Crabb had paused to deliver, by giving him a shove that drove him headlong into the cuddy.

‘I am sorry to detain you, Mr Dugdale,’ said the captain. ‘Mr Saunders is a rather nervous gentleman, and it might be agreeable to him to find you here.’

‘You do not detain me, Captain Keeling. This is an amazing business, almost too wonderful in

its way to believe in.—Have you ascertained how Crabb became possessed of that magical drug?—and magical it must be, captain, for I give you my word that never lay any corpse deadlier than that fellow Crabb showed when Hemmeridge removed the canvas from his face.’

‘I beg your honour’s pardon,’ exclaimed Bobbins, preserving his lamenting and whining voice, and knuckling his forehead as he spoke, whilst I could see old Keeling lifting his eyes to him with disgust and aversion strong in his purple countenance. ‘Mr Willett told me that Crabb ’ud say he’d got that there stuff off a travelling Jew that he fell in with at some Mediterranean port. He bought two lots of it, and tried a dose on a man who took it unbeknown, reckoning it good for spasms. He believed as it had killed the chap, sich was his corpse-like swound; but he come to all right arter four-and-twenty hours, and niver knowed nothen about it, and believed it still to be Monday when it were Toosday. This put the scheme he tried on here into his head.’

‘Has he ever attempted anything of the same sort before?’ inquired Keeling.

‘I dunno, sir. He’s a bad un. It ’ud make a marble heffigy sweat to hear him talk in his sleep.’

There was a knock at the cabin door, and Mr Prance ushered in Mr Saunders. The little chap looked very small as he entered holding his large hat in his hand. He was pale, and stared up at us with something of alarm as we rose to his entrance, the skipper giving him the same hide-bound bow that he had greeted me with.

‘Is Mr Saunders acquainted with the story of this business, Mr Prance?’ old Keeling inquired.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the mate. ‘I gave him the substance of it in a few words as we came along.’

‘It is extremely startling,’ said the little man, climbing on to the chair into which old Keeling had waved him, and dangling his short legs over the edge as a small boy might.

‘Your knowledge of drugs and medicines,’ Mr Saunders, is, I believe, very considerable?’ said the skipper.—‘The little fellow bowed.—‘This,’ said Keeling, holding up the phial, ‘is a drug, the stupefying effects of which, I am informed, are so remarkable that any one who takes it entirely loses animation, and presents such an aspect of death as will deceive the eye of the most expert medical practitioner. Is such a thing conceivable, Mr Saunders?’

The little man reflected very earnestly for some moments, with his eyes fixed upon Keeling. He then asked Mr Prance to hand him the phial, which he uncorked, and smelt and tasted.

‘I cannot be positive,’ he exclaimed with a slow, wise shake of his large head; ‘but I strongly suspect this to be what is known as *morion*, the death-wine of Pliny and Dioscorides.—Mr Dugdale, observe the strange, peculiar, faint smell—what does it suggest?’

I put the bottle to my nose and sniffed.

‘Opium will it be, Mr Saunders?’

‘Just so,’ he cried.—‘Captain Keeling, smell you, sir.’

The old skipper applied the bottle to his

nostrils and snuffled a little. 'I should call this a kind of opium,' said he.

'If,' exclaimed Mr Saunders, 'it be morion, as I believe it is, it is made from the mandragora or mandrake of the kind that flourishes in Greece and Palestine and in certain parts of the Mediterranean seaboard.'

'But am I to understand,' said Keeling, 'that a dose of it is going to make a man look as dead as if he were killed?'

'The effect of morion,' responded Mr Saunders, 'is that of suspended animation, scarcely distinguishable from death.'

'Could it deceive a qualified man such as Dr Hemmeridge?' demanded the skipper.

'I should think it very probable,' answered little Saunders cautiously; 'in fact, sir, as we have seen, he *was* deceived by the effects of that drug, be it morion or anything else.'

'You can go forward,' said the captain to Bobbins.

The fellow flourished a hand to his brow and left the cabin.

'Mr Saunders, I am obliged to you, sir, for your information,' continued old Keeling. 'I trust to have your opinion confirmed either in Bombay or in London. To me it seems a very incredible thing.—Mr Dugdale, I thank you for the trouble you have given yourself to attend here.'

He bowed; and little Saunders and myself, accompanied by Mr Prance, entered the cuddy.

'A most extraordinary business altogether,' cried the little man: 'it is wonderful enough, supposing the stuff to be morion, that a common sailor should be in possession of such a drug; but much more wonderful yet that it should occur to him to employ it as an instrument in probably the most audacious project ever adventured on board ship.'

'Hemmeridge might have opened Crabb,' said I.

'Well, the rogue foresaw it, and provided against it, as we know,' exclaimed Mr Prance. 'There is pocketable booty in the mail-room to the value of hard upon a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. A man like Crabb will run risks for such plunder, Mr Dugdale. If the sailmaker had kept his word and produced the bottle to Hemmeridge, the doctor would have been pretty sure to stay his hand.'

'Why, likely as not,' I exclaimed: 'but tell me, Mr Prance—that fellow Bobbins seems to have been coaxed very easily into peaching.'

'Ay,' said he; 'there'd been an ugly quarrel between him and Willett ten days ago. I believe the rascal would not have split whilst Crabb lay snug and secret in the hold; but on his showing himself, Bobbins took fright, thought of his neck, and being actuated besides by hatred of Willett, came forward and volunteered the whole yarn.'

'And how is he to be served?' inquired Mr Saunders.

'Left to be at large, sir,' answered the mate; 'and punishment enough, too, as any one may suppose, of a false-hearted, lily-livered shipmate who has to swing his hammock three or four months among a fore-castle full of hands. For my part,' added he with a laugh, 'if I were that miscreant, I'd rather be snug in irons along

with Willett and the cast-eyed pirate, stowed safe out of sight.'

He entered his cabin, and Mr Saunders and I stepped on to the quarter-deck.

### STRANGE VOICES.

No one that has not lived in the country and in the neighbourhood of trees has any notion of the strangeness of the sounds that are heard at night. The owls have very different notes. One snores, another to-whoos, and one screams. We have been positively scared by the appalling cries of the horned owl that we have heard in Brittany, like the screams of a person in pain. In Ceylon the Devil Bird is a constant source of alarm and inquiry. No one knows exactly what bird it is that produces the horrible blood-curdling cries that thrill through the night-air; but it is supposed to be an owl. A friend who has long lived in Ceylon says: 'Never shall I forget when first I heard it. I was at dinner, when suddenly the wildest, most agonised shrieks pierced my ear. I was under the impression that a woman was being murdered outside my house. I snatched up a cudgel and ran forth to her aid, but saw no one.' The natives regard this cry of the mysterious Devil Bird with superstitious terror. They believe that to hear it is a sure presage of death; and they are not wrong. When they have heard it, they pine to death, killed by their own conviction that life is impossible.

Autenrieth, professor and physician at Tübingen, in 1822 published a treatise on *Aërial Voices*, in which he collected a number of strange accounts of mysterious sounds heard in the sky, and which he thought could not all be deduced from the cries of birds at night. He thus generalises the sounds. 'They are heard sometimes flying in this direction, then in the opposite through the air; mostly, they are heard as though coming down out of the sky; but at other times as if rising from the ground. They resemble occasionally various musical instruments; occasionally also the clash of arms, or the rattle of drums, or the blare of trumpets. Sometimes they are like the tramp of horses, or the discharge of distant artillery. But sometimes, also, they consist in an indescribably hollow, thrilling, sudden scream. Very commonly they resemble all kinds of animal tones, mostly the barking of dogs. Quite as often they consist in a loud call, so that the startled hearer believes himself to be called by name, and to hear articulate words addressed to him. In some instances, Greeks have believed they were addressed in the language of Hellas, whereas Romans supposed they were spoken to in Latin. The modern Highlanders distinctly hear their vernacular Gaelic. These aërial voices accordingly are so various that they can be interpreted differently, according to the language of the hearer, or his inner conception of what they might say.'

The Jews call the mysterious voice that falls from the heaven Bathkol, and have many traditions relative to it. The sound of arms and of drums and artillery may safely be set down to

the real vibrations of arms, drums, and artillery at a great distance, carried by the wind. The barking of dogs is attributable to the Brent geese which pass in their migrations high overhead, generally at night, and make a strange sound not unlike the yelping of an aerial pack of hounds. They have given rise to the stories of the Wild Huntsman.

The writer was sleeping one night under his tent in Iceland, when he was suddenly roused by a note like that of a brazen trumpet sounded high aloft. He scrambled out of his tent, and looking up saw a flight of swans gilded by the midnight sun, against a translucent green sky. Such a note as that might well induce belief in a hunter galloping by and sounding his horn.

The English traveller Davy, whose rambles in Ceylon were published in 1821, relates that in April, at the commencement of the rainy season, the call of the Devil Bird is heard, though the creature has never been seen. This is not quite certain. In fact, the hideous noise made has as yet been brought home to no bird in particular, and the title of Devil Bird is given to that uncertain being which produces the unearthly cry.

The Dutch traveller Hafner, whose account of Ceylon was published in 1810, gives a description of his experiences, which strikes us as highly coloured. He says that he was traversing the highlands in the island at the end of the rainy season, when, about midnight, he heard a distant barking of dogs, that seemed to break from a range of mountains opposite. Almost immediately, however, he heard it behind him, at some distance, but waxing louder and louder. He fancied he could distinguish various men's voices, as if they were laughing and talking loudly. These sounds came and went—sometimes they were from one direction, sometimes from another, from near and from far. Then all at once they ceased, and a great stillness supervened; but after an interval, such a peal of voices in the air echoed from the mountains, that Hafner in alarm retreated under a cliff, when a piercing scream in his ear drove him from his shelter. Frightened nearly out of his wits, he dashed forth and heard around him harsh and confused voices, so strange, so weird, that he put his fingers into his ears. He was afterwards told that these were the cries of wandering spirits. What he heard was doubtless the passage of a flight of migratory birds.

A Mecklenburg traveller called Wolf, who spent twenty years in Ceylon, and published his description of the island in 1784, says that he heard once, and only once, at one o'clock at night a fearful voice. The cry was not exactly like that of a man or of an animal, but seemed to issue from some hollow. He had been told that such voices were to be heard in the north part of the island in the dry season, in the forests, and near ponds. Sometimes what was heard was a loud call, sometimes a shriek, sometimes like a song or musical call; but however it sounded, the effect on the spirit was overwhelming; even the boldest man shuddered. This frightful voice flew faster than any bird from one place to another. In an interval of a few seconds it could be heard from two points a mile apart. It did not occur to Wolf that possibly a pair of Devil Birds were calling to each other at that distance apart.

Knox, who spent many years in Ceylon at

the close of the seventeenth century, and whose *Travels* were printed in 1681, also mentions this voice, which he says was heard in the mountains, and not in the lowlands. Though the tone had some resemblance to the bay of a dog, it had that quality in it which would curdle the blood of him who heard it. It ceased suddenly at one point, and was heard again from quite another quarter. He says that the Cingalese were assured that it was the devil who, at night, uttered these frightful cries.

In the desert of Gobi, which divides the mountainous snow-clad plateau of Tibet from the milder regions of Asia, travellers assert that they have heard sounds high up in the sky as of the clash of arms or of musical martial instruments. If travellers fall to the rear or get separated from the caravan, they hear themselves called by name. If they go after the voice that summons them, they lose themselves in the desert. Sometimes they hear the tramp of horses, and taking it for that of their caravan, are drawn away, and wander from the right course and become hopelessly lost. The old Venetian traveller Marco Polo mentions these mysterious sounds, and says that they are produced by the spirits that haunt the desert. They are, however, otherwise explicable. On a vast plain the ear loses the faculty of judging direction and distance of sounds; it fails to possess, so to speak, acoustic perspective. When a man has dropped away from the caravan, his comrades call to him; but he cannot distinguish the direction whence their voices come, and he goes astray after them.

Rubriquez, whom Louis IX. sent in 1253 to the court of Mongu-Khan, the Mongol chief, says that in the Altai Mountains, that fringe the desert of Gobi, demons try to lure travellers astray. As he was riding among them one evening with his Mongol guide, he was exhorted by the latter to pray, because otherwise mishaps might occur through the demons that haunted the mountains lurking them out of the right road.

Morier, the Persian traveller, at the beginning of this century speaks of the salt desert near Khom. On it, he says, travellers are led astray by the cry of the goblin Ghul, who, when he has enticed them from the road, rends them with his claws. Russian accounts of Kiev in the beginning of the nineteenth century mention an island lying in a salt marsh between the Caspian and the Aral Sea, where, in the evening, loud sounds are heard like the baying of hounds, and hideous cries as well; consequently, the island is reputed to be haunted, and no one ventures near it.

The traveller Burckhardt, who visited Sinai in 1816, says that from the top of the mountain sometimes by day a thundering noise is heard, like the repeated discharge of cannon. The monks in the monastery assured Burckhardt that it had been heard five years before his visit; and the steward of the convent, who had lived in it forty years, remembered having heard it on several occasions at long intervals. It was not attended by earthquake.

The writer, one autumn night a year or two ago, was startled late by a crash, followed by a loud and strange series of cries. He rushed out of doors, and found that a peacock that had been roosting on the branch of a cedar near the house had fallen down, and woke up with the fall, that

had frightened it considerably and elicited its noisy protest. A relative of the writer was sitting up late one winter night writing, when she was startled by the strangest and most mysterious sounds at the window. The sounds were rasping, slow, and long protracted. Her heart stood still; she hesitated for long what to do; at last she recovered moral courage, went to the window and drew up the blind, to see—one of the deer of the park licking the frosted glass panes for the sea salt that had congealed on them after a gale from the Atlantic.

But one of the weirdest and most perplexing sounds on a window is produced by a snail crawling up the pane. The sound is somewhat musical, but is attended by a grating note caused by the rubbing of the shell against the glass. When the writer first heard this mysterious noise, he met with some difficulty in bringing it home to a snail, the little creature seemed so inadequate to produce such a volume of sound.

In Cornwall, and also in the east of England, a plaintive cry in the air at night is attributed to the Seven Whistlers. Out of the still, dark sky are heard the calls, sad and clear, Ewe! ewe! ewe! They burst loud on the ear, then become fainter, then are again heard loudly. The call is to the soul to depart.

'I heard 'em one dark night last winter,' said an old Folkestone fisherman. 'They came over our heads all of a sudden, singing Ewe! ewe! and the men in the boat wanted to go back. It came on to blow and rain soon afterwards, and was an awful night, sir! And sure enough, before morning a boat upset and seven poor fellows were drowned.'

The passage of the Brent geese has already been spoken of as occasioning the superstition relative to the Wild Huntsman. In the north of England the 'Gabriel Hounds' or 'Gabel-racket' are said to race by in mid-air barking before a death. Mr Henderson, in his *Folklore of the Northern Counties*, says that a friend in Yorkshire informed him that when a child was burned to death in Sheffield a few years ago, the neighbours immediately called to mind how the Gabriel Hounds had passed above the house not long before. From another gentleman he heard of a person who was hastily summoned one night to the sick-bed of a relative whose illness had suddenly assumed an alarming character. As he set out, he heard the wild sound of the creatures above his head; they accompanied him the whole way, about a mile, then paused, and yelped loudly over the house. He entered it; and found that the patient had just expired.

That the Irish Banshee may be traced to an owl admits of little doubt; the description of the cries so closely resembles what is familiar to those who live in an owl-haunted district, as to make the identification all but certain. Owls are capricious birds. One can never calculate on them for hooting. Weeks will elapse without their letting their notes be heard, and then all at once for a night or two they will be audible, and again become silent—even for months.

That most if not all the weird sounds that are heard at night in the air, invested with superstitious terrors, and often magnified and altered in quality by fear, are attributable to birds admits of no doubt. The gun has reduced the number

of our wild-birds enormously, and gamekeepers have no pity for owls. How vocal, how full of strange voices the nights must have been of old, when man was armed only with the sling and the bow!

## JULIUS VERNON:

A STORY OF HYDE PARK.

### CHAPTER XV.—CONCLUSION.

LIKE a thunderbolt out of a blue sky came the announcement next day that the murderer of Margaret Neale was neither Claude Faune nor Mr Musgrave, but—a woman! Even to the man whose intelligence had put the police on the true track, this announcement was a shock. He had not expected it.

The reader will recollect the two main facts in the narrative of Mrs Burton which shed a new light on the brain of Frank Holmes. These were the private marriage of the two persons who had passed as man and wife on the first day the law allowed; and the visit of the woman to Faune's rooms the morning he was arrested. The first fact suggested to Holmes that Musgrave might himself be Julius Vernon; and the second, that the woman's purpose in going there was to drop that parcel of the dead woman's letters in the rooms. They might have heard privately of the arrest at the time; they might be aware the detective was hunting Faune down; they certainly knew that, owing to the man's flight after his suspicious presence in the Park on the night of the murder, the train was laid, ready to be fired, for his arrest. Circumstances all favoured the suspicions against Faune, above all his expected marriage with Miss Clayton.

The chain of evidence against the Musgraves was quickly forged. When the man felt it closing round him with fatal strength, he made one last desperate and revolting effort to secure his own safety by offering his evidence against his wife! He admitted that he was 'Julius Vernon,' and that he had deserted his first wife. He met his second wife abroad, and told her of his former marriage, and that he believed Margaret Neale was dead; but without legal proof of this he could not make Lucy Morelli his wife. She came to England with him, when he explained to her that, in case he was free, a certain term of residence was necessary before they could be married. This term being short, they put up at the *Grand Hotel*. When he found—as no doubt he had expected—that Margaret Neale was living, and in London with Lady Southfort's family, he had much to do to prevent Lucy Morelli from committing suicide. Then her passion suddenly subsided, and he was puzzled what it meant. Then came the fatal night of the 10th of June. He was not dining with his wife that evening; but when he was standing in the Park with Faune he was startled at seeing her pass outside the railings; she halted an instant and looked towards them, but though her face was not visible, he recognised her. He



walked back to Charing Cross, and she was already there before him. By her looks, he knew that something had happened. She admitted she had been to the Park.

'You know what an Italian is,' he said, explanatorily. She did not look at her act with English eyes. She had lured the unsuspecting victim to the spot where 'Julius Vernon' had more than once met her in years gone by, and the swift and sure Italian hand with one silent stroke made Musgrave free. She demanded her bond now. As soon as he realised the awful position in which they stood, he warned her that immediate flight was their only chance. The woman laughed—called him 'white-livered'—and told him not to be a fool: he had been near the spot with another man, and his sudden disappearance now would be sure to bring suspicion quickly on his track. Musgrave was struck with the force of this warning. She was determined to stay there and watch them working in the dark—determined to stay there until he fulfilled his promise and made her his wife. The event showed it to have been the most prudent course. When they heard of the police being on Faune's track, the woman took the parcel of Margaret Neale's letters and dropped them in his rooms, exactly as Holmes concluded it to have been done.

The police, it will be remembered, had been kept in ignorance of the transaction of the cheque. Musgrave was asked what was his business with Faune in the Park that night. He told this story, too, without reservation—he wanted to save his neck, and was willing to tell everything. Musgrave had bought up a large amount of Faune's gambling debts, which, with some money due to himself of the same character, came to thirteen hundred pounds. Faune's confidence in his matrimonial prospects made him a little reckless; but when, on pressing for his money, Faune asked him if he would be satisfied with a ten days' draft, accepted by Mr Clayton but 'not negotiable,' he consented. He got the acceptance, which was due on the 10th of June; Faune was to notify him through the newspaper when ready to pay it. On receiving the five thousand pound cheque he retained the acceptance until the cheque was cleared; he believed the acceptance to be a forgery, but destroyed it on receiving the value of the cheque.

Had he returned Faune the balance of the cheque? No. On learning, that night, of the murder, he at once resolved upon flight; it was not till Monday that he finally decided to remain. He should want this money more than Faune. He knew the signature 'Frank Holmes' on the back of the cheque was spurious, though he was ignorant of Faune's motive for putting it there. He saw Faune that evening (Sunday evening), and perceived that he had been drinking. He told Faune that he would have to return the cheque to him, as he dreaded the risk of taking it to Clayton's bank or passing it through another bank; and pointed out that in this case he would be obliged to present Mr Clayton's acceptance to that gentleman next day for payment. Faune was terribly scared, and too intoxicated to suspect Musgrave's sincerity. Musgrave eventually proposed to attempt the passing of the cheque if Faune would allow him for the risk two

thousand pounds in all, which was only seven hundred more than his debt. Faune agreed; and then Musgrave carried his main object, which was to get Faune out of London, and so leave the coast clear for his own escape the moment he got the money. He frightened him to start to Dover, to be ready to cross if he received a telegram of the cheque being refused; Faune being probably sensible that Holmes would owe him no leniency for forging his name, doubtless made him all the readier to adopt this course. He had another motive, too, which Musgrave knew nothing of, but which seconded the proposal. He started for Dover, and of course received neither money nor telegram; and Musgrave, tied in London, and hourly expecting him to return, felt that fate was favouring him when he heard of suspicion having fallen so naturally on the fugitive.

Meanwhile, however, the police had obtained evidence enough of the guilt of Musgrave's wife without his assistance. The handwriting was identified; the unobservant advertisement clerk, confronted in the prison with a row of ten women similarly dressed, immediately recognised Mrs Musgrave; so also did the commissioner and Mrs Browning. It was found that she had gone out of the hotel the night of the 10th of June at nine o'clock, and there was not the least difficulty in finding the cabman who drove her to and from Hyde Park Corner. Her clothes were examined, with criminating results; and the fatal instrument itself—a stiletto—was discovered in one of her trunks.

Musgrave was now indignant against his wife as the cause of all his trouble. But for her, he would have left London immediately with five thousand pounds, and would now have been far away and safe. He had no scruple, therefore, in offering his testimony against her as the price of his own immunity; but the man's mortification was piteous when he found that his evidence was declined on those terms, and that he would have to take his trial.

We may now dismiss this couple by stating that retribution dealt with Musgrave in a striking fashion. His wife, seeing all hope lost, poisoned herself in her cell, no one being able to tell how she obtained the poison; and Musgrave had to stand his trial alone. He was condemned, and the sentence commuted to penal servitude for life.

Faune was released, and sent once more into the world from which he had so nearly been removed as a felon. As this took place, another man retired into the solitude of hard work and resignation. This was Frank Holmes. The Claytons, father and daughter, were gone to Westgate. Holmes trembled for what would next happen. Faune was free—cleansed of the awful charge; and Mary Clayton would be the last girl living to absolve herself of the reproach of having been a principal cause of the suspicion under which he had suffered. What would she do to make reparation?—rather, what would she not do! considering that she loved the man. To her merciful and gentle eyes, suffering would have purified him of much of his unworthiness. So be it!

Shutting himself in from all knowledge of what was taking place, and working hard in order to drive it out of his mind, Holmes con-

tinued in his rooms for a fortnight, only going out late in the night for a solitary walk on the Embankment. He can hardly realise to this day that the period was only a fortnight. Then one morning came to him a letter bearing the Liverpool postmark in a hand which he knew too well. It was from Faune, announcing his embarkation for Australia; but it contained more. He had seen Mr Clayton; and Holmes inferred from the terms of the letter that Mr Clayton had furnished him with money to start in a new world. But it was not this that brought the blood to the young man's face and the light to his eyes. Faune's letter went on:

'I know now that I wrote to Miss Clayton from Dover. Ask her to show you that letter, because it concerns you. When you have read it, you will perhaps perceive why I refused to explain the reason of my departure from London. I left so suddenly, on account of Musgrave's persuasions, but chiefly because I meant never to return. Had Musgrave sent me my clothes and the money, I should have gone to the Continent. The letter I refer to will explain why I went and why I kept silent. I knew too well that there was nothing to stay or come back for, and I had staked and lost everything. My silence is the only credit due to me. I cared little about my life. Even now I care little about it.'

Seizing his hat, Holmes rushed out to Charing Cross Station and caught a Margate train. By mid-day he arrived there, and started along the cliffs to Westgate. He cared nothing now about that Dover letter—he knew its purport as well as if he had read it—knew why Mary Clayton refused to let him see it. Oh, fool and blind that he had been! not to have known better; not to have known that it was to her pride—wounded by his own blindness—that Faune owed her tolerance of him. Perhaps, in time, when the sobbing of the late troubles was over, she would forgive him; and if forgiveness was ever worth waiting for, that of Mary Clayton surely was.

He met her on one of the walks in front of the *St Mildred's Hotel*, going down to the beach. Some of the colour had returned to her cheeks already; but the moment her eyes met those of Frank Holmes all the tell-tale blood in her glad heart bounded to her face. He took her trembling hand in both his own, caressing it tenderly.

'I had a letter from Faune this morning, Mary, which has sent me down to you, and now, I can't say what I want.'

'Don't say it, Frank,' she answered shyly, looking away. 'Does it matter very much?' For his look had said it all already.

'Were you soon going in?' he asked, hungering for speech which this public place would not allow.

'No, Frank; I was going to have a sail. There are the boats on the beach. Will you come with me?'

Would he, indeed? He threw back his shoulders and strode down the cliff in advance; and when the girl came up, he had the boat ready, and had sent the boatman away to cool himself with beer for a couple of hours.

'Because,' he explained, helping her in, 'I'm

going to pull the oars myself. I could pull a barge-load of bricks this morning; and I want you all to myself, Mary.'

Before they returned, Frank Holmes and Mary Clayton were as one in—amongst other things—the opinion that this was the most delightful spot on England's coast; and Mr Clayton, on discovering their opinion, showed the practical side of his character by engaging furnished, for the summer, the prettiest house upon that sunny cliff. The house was occupied very soon.

One day, two months later, when they were again drifting on the pleasant waters, Holmes, after observing his bride's face thoughtfully for some time, asked: 'Mary, are you conscious of it when your eyes are speaking?'

She blushed and laughed.

'It is wonderful,' he said slowly, 'how they do speak. They are always doing it. I have been watching them just now, speaking to the ripples. I know every word they say to me.'

'Dear me,' said Mary, smiling, and blushing again. This young man was always bringing blushes to her face now.

'But you can control them, too, Mary,' he went on. 'They never said an encouraging word to me when I was in darkness. You said you gave no answer to Faune; but they gave it—he understood, you see. Ah, those eyes! and they would not speak to me.'

'They did, Frank—one day, over on the cliff, when they were penitent,' she said softly, leaning forward and putting her hand in his.

P. L. M'DERMOTT.

#### A WORD FOR THE ROOK AND THE JAY.

ONE would have thought that the natural history of so familiar a bird as the common Rook had long since been thoroughly established, and that every useful quality, as also the contrary, had been so often repeated by well-known writers on ornithology, that nothing further remained to be said on the one side or the other; but this would appear to be erroneous. Of late, in the north of England, a growing dislike has obtained against the rook. In place of a useful bird, the friend of the farmer, he is now declared to be thoroughly mischievous, and to have changed altogether for the worse. Further, he is accused of having become a thorough poacher, a destroyer of partridges' nests, a pilferer of the fowlhouse, and a bad character in general. And in consequence of these many crimes and offences, we read that a relentless persecution is being carried on against the rook, and both landlords and tenants are combining to destroy the unfortunate bird in every possible way.

All this is surprising. We ask, what possible reason can there be for so general a favourite as the rook suddenly taking to bad habits such as described above, and can they be proved against him? We venture to say that these accusations have been greatly exaggerated, and that those now so eager to exterminate the rook will before long find out their mistake, and regret having drawn such hasty conclusions.

Over and over again, the destruction of birds has ended disastrously. Surely our neighbours

across the Channel have taught us a useful lesson in this respect. There are many parts of France, especially in the neighbourhood of large towns, where, from the cruel practice of killing every bird that flies, however puny and innocent, insects of various kinds have gained the upper hand, with the inevitable result that the crops of the husbandmen, the vines and orchards, all have suffered considerably from the unchecked ravages of these destroyers—thus again proving that the balance of powers as ordered by Nature cannot with impunity be interfered with.

But to return to the rook and his enemies. What is this cry we hear against him from 'far-off Northumbria'? We find it stated, among other serious and novel charges, that 'in a poultry-yard he has become more destructive than a hawk, and that ladies have had to complain of their ducklings, chickens, and eggs being carried off by rooks.' Now, we confidently assert that however true this accusation may be in the north of England, such a state of things is most exceptional, if not altogether unknown in our southern counties; and therefore it would be most ill advised to follow the example of Northumberland landlords and tenants in this wholesale destruction of the rook.

One of the commonest errors, even among fairly well-informed ornithologists, is to mistake the common carrion crow for the rook, which in figure it much resembles, and *vice versa*. We believe that not one lady in a hundred could distinguish between the two birds either when on the ground or on the wing; and we feel convinced that these tales of slaughtered chickens and ducklings should be laid to the charge of the real culprit, the vagrant crow, and not be foisted on to the shoulders of the poor rook. The carrion crow is fairly numerous in the north of England, still more so in the western parts of the country, but is comparatively rare in the south-eastern counties, the very quarter where the rook is most numerous; and yet, as before stated, we hear of no fresh complaints against the rook from our farmers of Kent, Sussex, or Surrey, beyond the old, well-known tiresome habits which have been handed down to posterity, such as, pecking up seed-corn, occasional forays on laid barley or corn in the stooks, potatoes dug out of the ground and carried off, and when pressed by dire hunger during severe winters, a mischievous habit of boring holes in turnips, thus letting in the frost and damp and destroying the root. We quite allow all these and sundry other peccadillos, such as occasionally sucking the eggs of game-birds in dry summers; and sometimes—though we believe this fault to be very rare—killing young pheasants or partridges; and yet we affirm that any experienced, unprejudiced agriculturist given to observing the ways of birds, and thus learning their real value, will at once, without hesitation, wisely spare the rook, scaring him away from the fresh-sown wheat, in place of destroying him with poisoned grain or other cruel methods, knowing well that later, the good qualities of the bird as an insect destroyer will amply reward him for his clemency.

It is a pretty sight on a bright autumn morning to watch a crowd of hungry rooks, often in company with a beautiful flock of sea-gulls, following the plough, as the fresh earth, crumbled

by the keen frost of the previous night, is turned over to the surface by the gleaming steel as it cuts its way through the hard ground. What is it that attracts that black mass of keen-eyed birds so close up to the ploughman's heels, struggling and hustling one another who shall first grip the prey? We know, or should know, quite well what they are about. Those rooks and their companions the sea-gulls are devouring in thousands various kinds of mischievous grubs, and worms, which would later, if left unmolested and to their own devices play havoc with the crop. Jack Frost when let into the ground by the plough's deep furrow quickly destroys the eggs of insects; but were there no rooks to pick up the old ones, they would bury themselves again in the soil, and later lay their eggs afresh.

It is interesting to watch the rook busy devouring earthworms on the pastures, especially after a heavy roller has passed over the grass, awakening sluggish *Lumbricus* from his repose, and causing him to peep out. In an instant the keen black eye of the rook fastens on the unfortunate; one quick blow of the bill and he has him by the head, and draws the reluctant wretch slowly and steadily from his retreat; for, mind you, he has no intention of breaking the worm in half by a too sudden jerk or pull, and thus losing half the spoil. A good-sized earthworm holds on tenaciously in this extremity, its ringed muscular body enabling it to cling strongly to the sides of its burrow. If the rook finds that the worm is too long to draw out with one effort, he doesn't let go his hold; the clever bird knows quite well that if he did so, the worm would instantly disappear like a spiral spring; so, to prevent such a catastrophe, not to say disappointment, the cunning old rook, having drawn Mr Worm out a good stretch, calmly and carefully places his foot down on it just where the tightened body comes out of the ground, and then quits his hold of the head, seizes the creature lower down, draws it out, and leisurely discusses the tender morsel.

When thus harmlessly employed, the rook shows great confidence in man, allowing the passer-by to approach quite close to him, and then only walking jauntily away without taking wing. But at other times, when bent on mischief, and engaged in picking up the farmer's seed-corn, the crafty bird is perfectly well aware that he is doing harm, and shows great wariness to guard against surprise. Two or three vigilant sentries are often posted on the tops of trees hard by to keep a lookout all round, and a single 'caw' of alarm from one of these keen-eyed watchmen—more especially if the intruder proves to be the dreaded 'man with the gun'—produces an instantaneous effect on the black mass of rooks; and it is amusing at such times to observe the hurry and confusion betrayed by the conscience-stricken birds, as, with hurried scrambling flight and hoarse croaks of fear, they make off in every direction.

Rooks, however, when once they have discovered newly-sown wheat are very persistent and tiresome in returning to the spot; and keeping well away from hedgerows and cover of any kind, settle down in the middle of the field, out of gunshot range, and unless an active crow-

boy is constantly on the move, speedily do mischief. A common round bullet discharged from a gun, and so aimed that the ball ricochets through the midst of a mass of rooks feeding on forbidden ground, has a wholesome effect on their nerves. The flock, scared by the report of the gun and whiz of the bullet in their midst, quickly disappear, and will not trouble the spot again for many a day.

Included in the Crow family is that beautiful merry bird the Jay. The old lines,

The joy-bird sat on the hickory limb;  
He winked at me, and I winked at him,

give us an idea of his lively social character; but one would imagine, from the constant persecution he receives, that a greater sinner among birds never flew. Here, again, we venture to say that when the sum-total of his misdoings are fairly recorded there is little to justify such ill-usage. The gamekeeper is the jay's special enemy; and it cannot be denied that occasionally, though we affirm rarely, the bird destroys the eggs of pheasants and partridges. Undoubtedly the jay is by nature a regular and inveterate egg-sucker; but the patient observer will find that the bird devotes his chief attention to the nests of small birds, more especially the thrush and blackbird, which are generally built in the thicket or evergreen shrubs, and that he seldom interferes with or searches for nests containing eggs *on the ground*. Moreover, the jay is arboreal in his habits, preferring the gloom of our densest woods, and seldom quitting them for a more open country. And we know that although pheasants inhabit the same coverts as the jay during the autumn and winter, yet, when spring arrives, and the hen-pheasant begins to look for a nesting-place, she leaves the thick woods and wanders away along hedgerows, narrow plantations, or lanes bordered by thick grass. Often enough she foolishly pitches upon a spot close to a much frequented high-road; but wherever the nest is made, it is nearly always away from and not within dense woods.

The partridge generally inhabits a still more open country during the 'danger' season, or, in other words, when she has maternal cares. Often enough her eggs are deposited in meadows or clover, so that both these game-birds at their nesting-time are away from the haunts of the wood-loving jay.

Again, we constantly hear it said by keepers that the jay uses his powerful conical-shaped bill in destroying the young of game-birds; but we maintain, from long experience, that this accusation is the exception, not the rule, and that many a time the misdeeds of the magpie—a really mischievous bird and an enemy to game of all kinds—have been through ignorance laid to the door of the jay.

For the rest, a sly visit to the cherry orchard betimes in the early morning, or an occasional inroad on the gardener's peas, and such-like small crimes, and we have recorded the besetting sins of the poor jay. The gamekeeper would do well to remember, before he raises his gun or sets his trap, that many is the time when the harsh grating alarm-cry from the depth of the wood of the ever-watchful jay has caused him to pause and listen, for he well knows from the bird's cry

that something is on the move disturbing the covert, maybe a poacher busy with his ferrets, a prowling cat, or, likely enough, if towards evening, Mr Reynard the fox starting on his rounds.

J. H. B.

### TOFANA, THE ITALIAN POISONER.

In the annals of most lands we generally find some period when the lust of shedding human blood was rampant; but few can point to a worse condition of existence than that which prevailed in the Italy of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Italy of the petty republics and principalities, when the most brutal selfishness and most cringing servility went hand in hand. When baseness, deceit, cruelty, and selfishness are combined in the character of public men, the profession of secret murder becomes one of the fine arts; in fact, so callous do people grow that they cease to think of killing as murder, but simply as the removal of a hateful object.

The most remarkable of these professional poisoners was a woman, by name Tofana, a native of Palermo. This monster, while still a young girl, by some means or other became possessed of the recipe for a mixture of which from four to eight drops were fatal. This liquid, which has become known under the name of 'Tofana Water,' has been described as clear, tasteless, colourless, and odourless. It was of such a nature that it baffled the cleverest medical men of the seventeenth century, and the acutest analysts were utterly unable to testify to its presence in the organs of one of its victims after the most searching post-mortem examination. It was, in fact, the poisoner's beau-ideal of a poison. Doubtless, if some modern Tofana were to make use of this so-called 'water,' she would not have the same guarantee of absolute security which her seventeenth-century prototype possessed. In the period during which she flourished, chemistry had scarcely risen to the dignity of a science; but in this nineteenth century it is not only an experimental but also a mathematical science. Our analysts can speak with as absolute certainty of the most infinitesimal quantities as others can of tons; they are accustomed to weigh with a balance which indicates the tenth of a milligramme (that is, the  $\frac{1}{100154}$  of a grain) with perfect distinctness; while many of their tests are sufficiently delicate to point out without the shadow of a doubt the presence of even the millionth part of a grain.

In the Italy of the period in question, women were but little better than the slaves of their male relatives; they were married or divorced in the most reckless way to promote political or social alliances, and generally discovered their places to be occupied by some other fair ones, who, though more favoured, were perhaps neither more nor less frail than themselves. It was to such wretched women that the infamous Tofana sold her secret, and with society in such a state, there were only too many fair ones who thought they could be benefited by the removal of some hard or faithless lord or some more favoured rival.

The first dose, administered in wine or tea or some other liquid by the flattering traitress,



produced but a scarcely noticeable effect; the husband became a little out of sorts, felt weak and languid, so little indisposed that he would scarce call in a medical man; but if he did, it was only to be told it was a mere nothing, which a draught or two would put to rights. After the second dose of poison, this weakness and languor became more pronounced, and the doctor would begin to think that, after all, the patient required to be put on a course of diet and rest. The beautiful Medea who expressed so much anxiety for her husband's indisposition would scarcely be an object of suspicion, and perhaps would prepare her husband's food, as prescribed by the doctor, with her own fair hands. In this way the third drop would be administered, and would prostrate even the most vigorous man. The doctor would be completely puzzled to see that the apparently simple ailment did not surrender to his drugs, and while he would be still in the dark as to its nature, other doses would be given, until at length death would claim the victim for his own.

Then, when too late, the dreadful word 'poison' would be uttered; upon which, of course, to save her fair fame, the wife would demand a post-mortem examination. Result, nothing; except that the woman was able to pose as a slandered innocent, and then it would be remembered that her husband died without either pain, inflammation, fever, or spasms. If, after this, the woman within a year or two formed a new connection, nobody could blame her; for, everything considered, it would be a sore trial for her to continue to bear the name of a man whose relatives had accused her of poisoning him.

While still at Palermo, Tofana became acquainted with an old sorceress, Hieronyma Spara, to whom she imparted her secret. The two worked together until the number of deaths among young married men began to attract attention; whereupon Tofana started for Naples, while Spara betook herself to the Eternal City. At Rome, Spara began operations on an extended scale. She formed a band of poisoners, the principal of whom was a woman named Gratosia, for, be it remembered Spara was well up in years. Spara's method of working seems to have been this: she gave herself out as a sorceress and fortune-teller, and in this capacity wormed the secrets out of the hearts of the silly women who consulted her. She would then cleverly insinuate that in three or four days the cruel husband or the faithless man, as the case might be, could be removed with the most absolute safety. A bargain was struck; mutual promises of the most profound secrecy were exchanged; and within the week there was a new widow in Rome. If the discontented wife were a member of the middle classes, Spara artfully contrived that the dangerous portion of the negotiations should be carried on by some of the other members of the gang; for she judged that the women of the 'masses' would be much more likely to betray her than the women of the 'classes.'

Of course, the number of deaths among newly-married men soon attracted the attention of the authorities in Rome, as it had done in Palermo; but though the police may have had their suspicions, it was some time before they were able

to bring the crimes home to the proper quarters; even after they knew that the sorceress Spara was implicated, it was long before they could obtain proof positive. At length, however, they found a lady who was willing to act in concert with them; and so well did this amateur detective carry out her rôle, that at last the police knew all the principal members of this infamous gang.

The band was taken and put to the torture, according to the custom of the time. All confessed except Spara, who seems to have had so little knowledge of human nature as to have thought some of the frail ladies whom she had assisted would step forward to protect her from justice. She withstood the torture several times, but, as no relief came, at length cried out in despair: 'Where are the Roman princes, nobles, and knights who have made use of my art? Where are the ladies who have promised me their favour?' But they came not; whereupon the miserable wretch denounced them all and confessed her crimes.

Pope Alexander VII. ordered Spara, Gratosia, and three others to be executed at once; within the month he sent several others of them to their last account; and the remainder he banished for ever.

It was in 1658 that this band of secret murderers was thus broken up and destroyed.

Meanwhile, the prime villain was still at large, exercising her terrible vocation not only at Naples, which was her headquarters, but in various parts of Italy. For many years she evaded the police and the custom-house officers with her bottles of poison in her luggage; and death after death in the most mysterious way was reported. At last, by mere accident it was discovered that a little old woman, a voluble and lively talker, was the infamous wretch who carried death far and near. In her luggage were found bottles labelled, 'Manna of St Nicholas of Bari,' and embellished with the saint's portrait, just as if it had been a registered trade-mark. At Bari, where St Nicholas was buried, the monks pretended that an oil-spring with miraculous healing properties welled out of his grave. This oil or 'manna' was sacred, and no policeman or custom-house officer dared lay profane hands upon it. No wonder, therefore, that the chatty little old woman who carried this healing oil about was allowed to pass unmolested.

As soon as the terrible secret was discovered, Tofana fled to a convent which had the right of sanctuary. General Thaun, Viceroy of Naples, gave orders for her arrest; but the sanctuary could not be broken, and all the religious bodies in Naples seemed determined to protect the wicked old wretch who had set religion at defiance. The contest between Church and State was continued with bitterness, until at last General Thaun lost patience and tore the wretch out of sanctuary by main force. This was in 1709.

At first, Tofana maintained her innocence; but, on being put to the torture, confessed ultimately to no fewer than six hundred murders! Short work was made of her after this, and she was condemned to be strangled. Just before her death, she also confessed that she had, only a day or so before her arrest, sent two boxes of her 'manna' to Rome, addressed in initials. All haste was made to the Eternal City, and

the boxes were found as described; but no one ever claimed them.

What was this poison? It is known as Tofana Water (*Aqua della Tofana*); but what was its composition? There have been many conjectures on this subject, some of them of the wildest description: (1) That it was principally composed of the saliva of mad people; (2) that it was nitric acid; (3) that it was a preparation of poppy and Spanish fly; (4) that it was sugar of lead and Spanish fly; (5) that it was extract of snapdragon, a common flower; and so on. Scientific men, however, are disposed generally to believe it to be an artfully disguised preparation of arsenic; and Garelli, head physician to the Emperor Charles VI., stated that his imperial master, who saw the official reports of the trial, told him it was a preparation of crystallised arsenic dissolved in water with *Herba Cymbalaria*.

Whatever the poison may have been, the reports as to its action would seem to have been exaggerated, for no known poison would work precisely as reported—at once so bland and so deadly; while, on the other hand, we think we are speaking with the strictest scientific accuracy when we state that the modern toxicologist would undertake to detect every and any poison administered in a fatal dose, if the case were presented to him within a reasonable time after death.

#### A VERY OLD DICTIONARY.

BURROWING lately in that great storehouse of literature, the British Museum Reading Room, the writer happened to light on a quaint old dictionary, which illustrates in a striking manner the growth of the English language, and the changes it has undergone during the last two centuries and a half. It is a small paltry volume, duodecimo size, dated 1626, and entitled in the prolix fashion of the time, 'The English Dictionary: or An Interpreter of Hard English Words, enabling as well Ladies and Gentlewomen, Young Schollers, Clarkes, Merchants, as also Strangers of any Nation to the understanding,' &c., by H. C., Gent. The author was Henry Cockeram, belonging to a Herefordshire family. His little book, which ran through many editions, was one of the earliest dictionaries published, a similar volume by a Dr Bullokar, a medical man, being dated a few years earlier. Both confine themselves very much to the more difficult words; indeed, the interpretation of 'hard' words, rather than the explanation of all words great and small, seems to have been the leading notion in the minds of these early lexicographers. The derivation of words was not even thought of at that stage, the first to attempt etymologies being Nathan Bailey, of Stepney, about a hundred years later; and after him Dr Johnson.

Many curious features are noticeable in these seventeenth-century manuals in the way of obsolete words, quaint definitions, and the alterations of meaning which many English words still in use have undergone. Probably few persons who have not investigated the matter have any idea of the extensive changes that have

taken place in these as well as in other departments of philology. The scientific study of the origins of words, more especially, is a comparatively recent thing. Cowper gave humorous expression to the prevailing indifference on the subject in his time when he wrote:

Those learned philologists who chase  
A panting syllable through time and space,  
Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark  
To Gaul—to Greece—and into Noah's ark.

But we have changed all that, and it may therefore not be a superfluous task to give some illustrations, from Cockeram's work, of the contrast between English past and present—that is, between the philological fashions current in the reign of James I. and those of the present day.

As examples of the changes which have taken place in the meaning of many English words still in use, may be noted the following: 'enormious,' (*sic*) meaning 'wicked,' a signification still surviving in the substantive enormity; 'buxom,' which is rendered 'pliant, obedient,' and 'buxomness' as 'loveliness'—both of which meanings, although found in modern dictionaries, are quite obsolete. And nowadays, in addition to jolly, which is the usual modern acceptation of the word, the element of stoutness must also be included. Nobody ever heard buxom applied to a thin woman. An equivalent for 'solitary' is found in 'monastical' which is at least an example of solitary living. Then we have to 'blunder' paraphrased by 'to bestir one's self'; 'to improve,' to 'raise rents'; 'impeach,' to 'hinder'; and 'vegetate,' to 'make strong.' Among substantives, 'catastrophe' has an odd signification, the rendering being 'the end of a comely,' in which sense it is used by Shakespeare, although the end of a tragedy would be nearer the present meaning. Other instances are 'orchestra,' meaning 'a skaf-fold'; 'sycophant,' 'a false accuser'; 'sinews,' 'nerves'; 'appendix,' 'a waiter'; 'miscreant,' 'an infidel,' applied to Joan of Arc by Shakespeare; 'speculation,' 'a watching in high places.' The latter two are both literal renderings according to the etymology, and much more exact than the modern explanations. So also 'harbinger,' 'one that takes up lodgings for others'; and 'illustrate,' to 'make famous or noble,' a legitimate explanation, if we consider it is from the same root as illustrious. 'Illustrate' and 'illustration,' however, are now chiefly used in connection with the embellishment of books or periodicals. A century ago, 'decorations' was the usual term, as, for example, 'The Works of William Shensstone, with Decorations.'

Many of the definitions are amusing, and some of them ludicrously absurd. The 'pole' is described as 'the end of the axle-tree whereon the heavens do move,' a very primitive explanation. The 'Hebridean wave' seems rather a poetical substitute for the 'Irish Sea'; and a 'badger' is a still more extraordinary equivalent for a corn-merchant—'one that buys corne or other victual in one place to sell it in another.' Still funnier are some of the natural-history definitions. A 'baboon' is said to be 'a beast like an ape but farre bigger'; a 'lynx' is 'a spotted beast—it hath a most perfect sight, inasmuch as it is said that it can see thorow a wall.' The account of the 'salamander' reads like an

elaborate joke—'a small venomous beast with four feet and a short tail; it lives in the fire, and at length, by his extreme cold, puts out the fire.' Turning to more general topics, we have the 'alphabet' defined as 'the cross row of letters;' and 'an abecedarian' is 'one who teaches the cross row.' According to Cockeram, 'an idiot' is 'an unlearned ass;' a 'labourer,' a 'swinker;' and 'a heretick' is sketched more roundaboutly, but with a clear assertion of the right of private opinion, as 'he which maketh choice of himselfe what poynts of religion he will believe and what hee will not.' Then from classic times, the 'Olympic games' are 'solemn games of activity;' and 'Amphitrite' is not, as usual, the goddess of the sea, but the 'sea' itself. 'Mathematicks' and 'mathematicians' are hardly dealt with. The latter means 'a soothsayer;' and the science, as defined, includes nearly all knowledge—'the arts of arithmetic, musick, geographie, geometrie, astronomy, astrology, cosmography;' reminding one of the trivium and quadrivium of the schoolmen of the middle ages. 'Actresse' has a very literal and interesting signification—'a woman doer;' but at this decade of the seventeenth century there were no actresses in the modern sense of the term, the female parts being then taken by boys or young men. Women actors first appeared in 1660.

Words which have become obsolete are numerous. There is 'agonist,' meaning a 'champion,' or one striving for the mastery; 'adequate,' as a verb, 'to make level;' 'bucinate,' 'to blow a trumpet;' 'aduncity,' 'hookedness,' both words being extinct. 'Caleb' is explained as 'a bachelor,' an apparently unaccountable definition; 'ventoy' interpreted as a lady's fan; and many others. There is a large class of other words which have come down to us only in other forms or parts of speech. Take, as apt examples, in our English of to-day, threnody, but not 'threné,' a lamentation; lassitude, but not the verbal form 'lassate;' ineffable, but not 'effable;' behests, but not 'hests;' excelsior, excelling, &c., but not 'exceleitie;' germane, but not 'germanitie,' brotherhood; internecine, but not 'internecate;' tragedy, but not 'tragedize,' both of these old verbs meaning 'to kill.' Some words, again, have survived, but with a change of prefix, such as 'sufflated,' 'conspicuity,' 'adcorporated,' 'orambulate,' instead of inflated, perspicuity, incorporated, perambulate, as they are now printed. These various examples of changes in the language are both interesting and instructive, and show, what is indeed more obvious now than at any former period, that the English vocabulary is not a fixed quantity, but is constantly gaining accessions or suffering diminution. And it may be here said that in recent years the influx of slang phrases and words, and a too facile habit among all classes of making use of them, may afford ground for the opinion that the well of 'English undefiled' is more turbid than it was.

An interesting question suggested by this ancient waif of a book is the number of English words now existing. Considerable difference of opinion exists on this point. Mr George P. Marsh, an American author of repute, in his *Lectures on the English Language*, estimates that the number (in 1861) 'probably does not fall short of one hundred thousand;' and large additions,

especially in art and science, have come into use since that date. Other writers, however, come to a different conclusion, and think that forty thousand would include the whole. It depends a good deal on how calculations are made. If all the subsidiary words—participles and the like—are to be taken into account, it will swell the sum-total very considerably. Taking the first three words that occur at random, we find that from 'demonstrate,' in one of our modern dictionaries, there are thirteen derivatives; from the word 'bright' there are twelve; and from 'deplore' there are ten. There is also redundancy in other forms. In one of Todd's editions of Dr Johnson there are upwards of eighty words with the prefix 'all'—all-complying, all-divining, all-drowsy, and so on—a very notable instance of dictionary padding. In ways like these the vocabulary may be indefinitely increased. Probably, if we take leading words and all their derivatives, the number at the present time will exceed Mr Marsh's estimate. An approximate verification of this may be found by multiplying the number of pages in any good modern dictionary by the average number of words in a page. Shakespeare's works, it is believed, include about fifteen thousand separate words, and Milton's about eight thousand; but from these figures we have no criterion of the extent of the actual English vocabulary. It may be mentioned here that while Cockeram has only about seven or eight thousand words, there are in Bailey's Dictionary approximately about thirty-six thousand, and in Johnson's not more than that. In some of the larger modern works, again, the figures, as has been said, reach to upwards of one hundred thousand.

In Dr Johnson's vocabulary many technical and scientific terms were omitted, and in his original preface he excuses himself in a very naive and characteristic fashion. 'I could not,' he says, 'visit caverns to learn the miner's language, nor take a voyage to perfect my skill in the dialect of navigation, nor visit the warehouses of merchants and the shops of artificers to gain the names of wares, tools, and operations of which no mention is found in books.' An adverse critic might be inclined to ask, why not? But all the same, it will be readily conceded that he did a great work according to his lights. The science of philology has been revolutionised since his day, but his labours largely contributed to the earlier stages of its progress.

#### PALM-WINE.

MEN of all races have by some instinctive process discovered the art of preparing fermented liquors. These liquors are produced, either directly or indirectly, from the natural sugars which plants contain, or from the sugars which we prepare by artificial means. Hence it is that whatever be the material from which these liquors are made—whether the juice of the sugar-cane, the must of the grape, the wort of malted grain, the sap of the palm-tree, the juice of the apple or the pear, the milk of the Tartar mare, the sap of the aloe, or the juice of the ava—the intoxicating principle present in them is always the same—namely, alcohol. From this it follows

as a natural consequence that the effects of these exhilarating beverages upon the human system are in nearly every case the same. A wide difference, therefore, prevails between fermented liquors and narcotics; for we find that, unlike fermented liquors, each narcotic indulgence produces its own peculiar and special effect.

Though we know but little of palm-wine in Europe, it is largely used as an exhilarating beverage in India and other parts of Asia, in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, in Africa, and in some parts of America, such as Chili; indeed, it is probably consumed by a larger number of the human race than the wine produced from the grape.

Most trees of the palm tribe contain a sap which is rich in saccharine matter, and it is from this sweet juice that palm-wine—or, as it is sometimes called, 'toddy'—is prepared. At least two methods of obtaining this sap appear to be generally employed. In the islands of the Pacific the spathe or flowering head of the palm-tree is bound up tightly with sennit, and is then cut. The sap exudes from the wound, and is caught in a cocoa-nut shell suspended underneath. When the juice ceases to drop, another piece is cut off the spathe, a fresh quantity of sap is obtained, and the process is repeated until the spathe is entirely removed. Soon, however, a new flowering head is formed above the old one, and this, when sufficiently grown, is treated in exactly the same manner.

On the west coast of Africa the sap is obtained by making an incision just below the crown of leaves with which a palm-tree is surmounted. The incision slopes upwards and inwards; and the juice which exudes is conducted by a small piece of bamboo into a gourd or vessel placed underneath the wound.

The sugar which the sap contains is exactly the same kind as is yielded by the sugar-cane. In some countries, therefore, the palm-juice is boiled down after proper treatment, and furnishes a sugar which, when refined, cannot be distinguished from the best produce of the West India Islands. In other countries the sap is allowed to ferment spontaneously—a change which occurs very quickly in hot countries—the sugar is thereby converted into alcohol, and the liquid acquires intoxicating properties.

As might be expected, the juice of a palm-tree varies both in quality and quantity with the species of palm from which it is extracted. The place of growth also appears to exert considerable influence upon the readiness with which the sap ferments. Hence it is that different varieties of palms are employed in different parts of the world for the preparation of wine or toddy. On the western coast of Africa, for example, the beverage is obtained from the oil-palms, a species which are said to yield wine of the best quality. The tree is tapped in the evening; and in the morning the gourd which receives the sap is found filled with a liquid somewhat resembling the milk of a cocoa-nut, but richer and sweeter. The juice soon ferments and becomes intoxicating, but the percentage of alcohol which it contains is comparatively small.

In the fertile oases with which the Sahara and the other deserts of Northern Africa are dotted, large groves of date-palms are to be seen,

from which the Arabs and other wandering tribes of the desert obtain an intoxicating beverage which they call *lagmi*. When drunk immediately, the sap of this palm resembles rich milk; but when allowed to stand for a time, it ferments, and acquires the flavour and sparkling qualities of champagne.

The use of wine is strictly prohibited by the Koran, but the intoxicated Mohammedan excuses his apparent disregard of the injunctions of the Prophet by saying: 'Lagmi is not wine, and the prohibition of the Koran refers to wine.'

The same species of palm-tree is very abundant in the hilly Indian province of Bahar. Here the annual tapping for toddy is made on alternate sides of the tree, and in this way the trunks become curiously distorted, growing upwards in a zigzag direction. In other parts of India the beautiful fan-palm and the toddy-palm are the varieties chiefly employed in the manufacture of the wine. The toddy-palm will frequently yield more than one hundred pints of sap in the course of twenty-four hours!

In Ceylon, whole forests of the cocoa-palm are set apart for the preparations of fermented liquor; while in the islands of the Indian Archipelago, the Moluccas, and the Philippines, it is the sap of the gommuti-palm which is allowed to ferment and furnish an exhilarating beverage known as *neva*. The natives of the beautiful islands of the Pacific obtain their toddy or *karaca* by wounding the flowering head of the cocoa-nut tree; and each tree yields from two to six pints of liquid in twenty-four hours. When drunk immediately, it closely resembles the milk of the young cocoa-nut; but when allowed to stand for a few hours, it ferments, acquires intoxicating properties, and becomes acid.

Nearly everywhere in Africa and in many parts of Asia the fermented sap is subjected to distillation, and thus yields a strong brandy or spirit, which, like palm-wine itself, has received different names according to the district in which it is produced, or the variety of palm from which the wine has been procured.

#### FULFILMENT.

'Under the influence of the sun the last remnants of winter vanish, almost, as it seems to us, by magic; leaves open, birds sing, and flowers smile from the brown earth. It is as if some good enchanter had waved his wand and transformed all.'

Lo, Spring is here! Her soft, transforming hand  
She lays on branches, cold and brown and bare,  
And swift, like work of some magician's wand,  
Verdure and bloom are round us everywhere:  
Buds open in the warm and perfumed air;  
And birds' glad voices thrill the grateful ear;  
Each moment sees the birth of something fair.  
The April morn is fresh, serene, and clear;  
No withered forms make sad the heart that grieves  
O'er Autumn's hectic glory; all is new,  
And 'mid the loveliness of half-blown leaves,  
The kind Spring sun shines in a heaven of blue.  
Linger a while, delicious days! ye are  
More charming than full Summer's radiance far.

J. C. HOWDEN.

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